Chloe as Curator: Art as Radical World-Making

November 6, 2015 By Visual AIDS

Chloe Dzublio in front of her drawings at the annual Prince George Art Show in 2010

Chloe Dzubilo's trans embodiment is drawn in cursive--in pink, blue, gold and blood red. She sews together words; she invents a language of resistance.

Transfeminist. Transolution. Transeuphoria.

In her rich, text-heavy archive, Dzubilo most notably used language as a rallying cry.

She created slogans for survival.

In 2011 at Umbrella Arts in the East Village, Dzubilo and Jeffrey Greene co-curated Transeuphoria, for which Chloe held the dual role of artist and curator. Transeuphoria was a collection of work from trans artists, most of whom Chloe's friends, and many of whom were struggling to maintain an artistic practice. Her work is also featured posthumously in Bring Your Own Body: Transgender Between Archives and Aesthetics, a show of trans artists curated by Jeanne Vaccaro and Stamatina Gregory, on view at Cooper Union through November 14.

In anticipation of Visual AIDS's event Transeuphoria Now on Thursday, November 5, which revisits Dzubilo's legacy as artist, curator, and collaborator, Visual AIDS intern Maia Paroginog gathers reflections from Jeffrey Greene, T De Long, Jeanne Vaccaro and Stamatina Gregory about Chloe as curator / art as radical world-making.

Jeffrey Greene on meeting Chloe, their collaborative relationship, and putting Transeuphoria into motion

How familiar were you with Chloe's artistic practices?
I met Chloe at the Prince George, an old grand hotel that had been converted into an SRO [single-room occupancy housing for for low-income residents] by Common Ground. I had been organizing art workshops there, sort of an art collective, an annual show, and "Art Hunters," which involved monthly trips to unusual spaces and exhibitions around the city. The work was focused on building community, encouraging people to "un-marginalize" themselves and get out of their small apartments and ultimately make dynamic artwork through consistent endeavors and critiques.

It turns out these buildings are occupied by a lot of artists and a lot of trans individuals--being an artist and/or being transgender can make it hard to pay the bills. Chloe was aware of my projects, and would occasionally stop by to talk, get supplies, get advice, but overall she was not comfortable with really being involved. Probably for a lot of reasons, but living in a building with 450 other people, riding the elevators, dealing with people talking about you or looking at you strange is draining, draining, draining. Chloe tried to keep as much of her life outside of the building as possible.

Our first real project together involved an annual show in the building. These shows were held in a beautiful gallery space--usually closed off to tenants and accessed from the back of the building--which led to a huge beautiful ballroom. The ballroom and the gallery were rented out throughout the year for weddings and other events. Chloe agreed to participate in the show, but chose some artwork that was definitely not PG rated--drawings detailing her battles in the hospital in graphic detail, etc. They were great drawings, but definitely not ideal as the backdrop for the weddings that would be taking place in the space.

Chloe was having none of it. I think she felt some ownership of the space. The ballroom had been amazingly refurbished through a project with Alpha Workshops that provides decorative arts

training to HIV-positive individuals. Chloe argued against my censorship/any censorship, and she really got the whole workshop riled up and on her side; she was that way. Pretty soon everyone was claiming that they could hang anything anywhere, in other people's homes and on and on. I tried to argue that sometimes in some places there are limits.

So, my first collaborative work with Chloe involved me being the censor that didn't understand her issues. It did end up being a great starting point because it forced Chloe to really verbalize who she was, what she was thinking, and what she was fighting against every day--every little moment of her life. As much as I tried to argue my point, it made me realize that she had a body of experience that I didn't really think about.

What about the show's content? What did that curation process look like?
Over a brief time I really started thinking about Chloe's work, her life and the stories she started sharing. She recounted how difficult it was to find exhibition opportunities for herself and her friends. We started talking about doing a show. Two other trans artists making really great work were already involved in my workshops at the PG and another building, Josie Collins and Donna Collins, two very different people despite the name-sharing. Chloe and her partner, T De Long, were making great work and Chloe had so many friends making art and struggling for--she was right in the middle of an incredible, dynamic crew. She had every reason and relationship to organize amazing projects but really lacked the health and funds to make it happen. I agreed to use the money I was making to run the projects at the PG to fund the show.

We came up with show's title, inspired by Chloe's "hands in the air" drawings and her welcome admission that despite all of the pain and indignity she faced, "acting on a faith," her faith of who she was, was euphoric. It ended up being an exhibition of "gender movers." We reached out to her friends and mine, found a space, silk-screened some posters; it came together pretty quickly.

What's one lasting thing that you'd want the audience to remember about Chloe's legacy?
Chloe was so good at communicating the day-to-day minutiae of her life: being HIV positive, trans, dealing with unhelpful and often openly hostile people, institutions and systems. She spoke from a very personal place with great wisdom and great humor. Chloe was a funny, compelling and revelatory speaker. She hoped to travel Transeuphoria, speak on college campuses--she would have been so great at that: You listened to her and you empathized and you admired. I'm thankful her work still exists, full of her wit, wisdom, humor and experience.

T De Long on Chloe, collaboration, and legacy

What did artistic collaboration with Chloe look like? How did this develop over the years that you knew her?
I met Chloe in 2007 so we had a very brief time together. She wasn't doing any visual work prior to that. I encouraged her to draw, to put her energy and frustrations into a visual format. She wanted to do a movie, a film, a life story, but it didn't seem that that could just happen. She needed something immediate, which is why I encouraged her to draw. She was upset about the fact that

her hands couldn't work so well anymore. She had a lot of joint-bone problems, long-term effects from HIV. We did some large collaborative visual work. I traced her body on a large yellow sheet of paper; they showed it at her memorial.

What did you feel was successful about the process and the Transeuphoria exhibit? What challenges did you all face?
She was very good at reaching out to people. I saw her really shine in that role. It's sad that she passed away like a month after it came down. It was so sudden, so abrupt. Things were really starting to pick up for her. She's been in so many shows. The attention never really stopped.

Do you have any general thoughts concerning trans art and the visibility of trans artists?
It's changed so much. That show [Bring Your Own Body] is really great.

So much has changed in terms of trans visibility and the word transgender. Laverne Cox was Chloe's next-door neighbor. And if you'd told Chloe, "Your next-door neighbor will be on the cover of Time magazine. A transgender person will be on the cover of Time," we would've thought, "How?"

She would've been so happy. There's so much more to do, one serious issue being the murders of trans women of color. It's an epidemic. Even if you have visibility, even if you are in the mainstream, there's still a lot of work to be done.

What do you hope people remember the most about Chloe's legacy?
It goes so far back--she was doing a lot of work in the early '90s. She was appointed by Mayor Bloomberg to do trans sensitivity training in hospitals. People remember her for that, and her kindness. She's definitely remembered for speaking out.

Jeanne Vaccaro and Stamatina Gregory on Chloe and Bring Your Own Body

What did the process of curating Bring Your Own Body look like?
Vaccaro: One of the things we thought about was materials. Part of the title of the exhibition are the underlying questions: "What is a body?" "How is it shaped?" "What are its properties?" There is a very wide range of media and materials in the show: sculpture, film, digital collage, watercolor, denim. In choosing to de-emphasize lens-based practices we were thinking about the violence of photographic representation in the context of trans experience and the pathologizing of that gaze.

Was curating a diversity of trans experiences an important part of Bring Your Own Body?
Vaccaro: Yes. Most importantly, we wanted to pose questions and not answers and offer an alternative to straightforward narratives by showcasing a multiplicity of experiences and forms.

Was there any sort of urgency in curating an all trans show?
Vaccaro: Yes. There is a crisis of violence facing trans people, and art can function as a form of

political gathering, survival, and community world making. In this particular moment of heightened transgender visibility, which so often eclipses the diversity of trans life in favor of a narrative of normalization, we hope to take advantage of the fact that people are paying attention.

How do you understand Chloe's legacy as an artist, curator, and activist?
Gregory: Chloe's practice is really interesting in that visual art was only one of her many creative outputs. Other types of creativity and activism for Chloe were as important, including her racial politics and activist practice. She inhabited many worlds and embraced what can be a tension between the aesthetic and the political.

Vaccaro: We went to Fales to look at her archives and were overwhelmed by how prolific she was, and ultimately selected these six beautiful text works in gold marker that really invent new forms of language, almost like slogans. She made many zine style writings about her confrontations with gentrification, homelessness, the crisis around public housing in New York City, being HIV positive--these are things that shaped her life as a transwoman. In all the work we wanted to think about a trans experience that isn't singly defined.

Gregory: Chloe was was theorizing every day, evident in her diary entries and her drawings. Her work was poetic in that it incorporated repetition but was also very much about objects. This is one coherent part in a large body of work that would otherwise be impossible to encapsulate.

Yeah, like she's inventing language. She's using words like transfeminist.
Gregory: And transeuphoria. That [Transeuphoria] was a historic show because of its content. It's extraordinary that it was a radical show so late in history.

Vaccaro: Transeuphoria was a landmark moment. We wanted to include that in the archive of this show too.

Gregory: Transeuphoria as a signal of a curatorial practice was meaningful for us. It emphasized the joy; that the work often involving pain doesn't always have to involve pain. It's the work of survival. Art is a space for radical world-making.

Maia Paroginog is an intern at Visual AIDS who is entering their final undergraduate year at Stanford with focuses in visual art-making, arts writing, and comparative studies in race and ethnicity. Their work employs several mediums and representations, which range from abstract sculpture to figurative painting. Their artwork and academic interests revolve around bodily dysphoria, queering interpersonal relationships, intersectional feminism, power/privilege, and the abject abstract. They use queer art to interrogate notions of "identity" and are interested in its uses in addressing collective trauma.

Jeffrey Greene is an artist, musician and curator who spends most of his time in Connecticut's prisons, organizing and maintaining arts collectives. He co-curated Transeuphoria with Chloe Dzubilo in 2011 at Umbrella Arts in the East Village. Transeuphoria was an exhibition of "gender

movers...seeing a truth inside...having the courage to reveal, express and act upon that truth...like faith." The exhibition was re-installed as part of Looking Back / The 6th White Columns Annual at the end of 2011.

T De Long is a New York City-based singer/songwriter, rapper, audio provocateur, visual /performance artist, trans-man and surviving spouse of Chloe Dzubilo, who collaborated closely with Dzubilo on multiple art projects, including the 2011 Visual AIDS Print+ Edition tote bag. De Long has also curated music and performance-art programs and founded the Warm-Up Series at MoMA PS1. De Long's brutally honest lyrics can be heard in such songs as "Business," "Living Among," "Socialism New York City," "Money Star Hustle," "Communist Diet," and "No Glove/No Love" (with Chloe Dzubilo and Snax.)

Jeanne Vaccaro is a research fellow at the Kinsey Institute and postdoctoral fellow in Gender Studies at Indiana University. She is co-curator of Bring Your Own Body: Transgender Between Archives and Aesthetics and a collective organizer of the New York City Trans Oral History Project.

Stamatina Gregory is a curator and art historian. A doctoral candidate at the Graduate Center at City University of New York, she writes on contemporary landscape photography, militarism, activism, and the media. She has taught art history, critical theory, and writing at Hunter and Baruch colleges, the University of Pennsylvania, and at the State University of New York, Purchase College, where she was visiting professor in 2011-2012.

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